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Gagnon, Jean-Paul (2010) *On democracy*. QUTE Magazine

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## **TITLE: ON DEMOCRACY<sup>i</sup>**

If one clear argument emerged from my doctoral thesis in political science, it is that there is no agreement as to what democracy is. There are over 40 different varieties of democracy ranging from those in the mainstream with subtle or minute differences to those playing by themselves in the corner. And many of these various types of democracy are very well argued, empirically supported, and highly relevant to certain polities. The irony is that the thing which all of these democratic varieties or the 'basic democracy' that all other forms of democracy stem from, is elusive. There is no international agreement in the literature or in political practice as to what 'basic democracy' is and that is problematic as many of us use the word 'democracy' every day and it is a concept of tremendous importance internationally.

I am still uncertain as to why this problem has not been resolved before by far greater minds than my own, and it may have something to do with the recent growth in democratic theory this past decade and the innovative areas of thought my thesis required, but I think I've got the answer. By listing each type of democracy and filling the column next to this list with the literature associated with these various styles of democracy, I amassed a large and comprehensive body of textual data. My research intended to find out what these various styles of democracy had in common and to create a taxonomy (like the 'tree of life' in biology) of democracy to attempt at showing how various styles of democracy have 'evolved' over the past 5000 years.<sup>ii</sup> I then ran a word frequency analysis program or a piece of software that counts the 100 most commonly used words in the texts. This is where my logic came in as I had to make sense of these words. How did they answer what the most fundamental commonalities are between 40 different styles of democracy?

I used a grounded theory analysis which required that I argue my way through these words to form a 'theory' or plausible explanation as to why these particular words and not others are the important ones for answering the question. It came down to the argument that all 40 styles of democracy analysed have the following in common

- 1) A concept of a citizenry.
- 2) A concept of sovereignty.
- 3) A concept of equality.
- 4) A concept of law.
- 5) A concept of communication.
- 6) And a concept of selecting officials.

Thus, democracy is a defined citizenry with its own concept of sovereignty which it exercises through the institutions which support the citizenry's understandings of equality, law, communication, and the selection of officials. Once any of these 6 concepts are defined in a particular way it creates a style of democracy. From this, we can also see that there can be more than one style of democracy active in a particular government as a citizenry is composed of many different aggregates with their own understandings of the six concepts.

When I got to this stage I couldn't believe that I might have figured something out – which is a surprising if not scandalous claim to some in social sciences as I am not sure that we are supposed to figure anything out. I needed to convince myself, and others, that this might be it. So I embarked on a process of trying to empirically 'triangulate' my findings which is a fancy way of saying that I used three different methods to investigate my claim since this for some reason makes it more believable. Firstly, I ran a program that checked for the frequency of the six terms in the textual data which showed that they were widely used. No surprises there as I got the words from the data in the first place. Secondly, I ran a 'proximity analysis' on various word pairings (which means I tried to see if these words are used close to each other in the data) as this contributes to the point that these words are related in the text in perhaps the same way as they are related in my argument. Finally, I used the 'theory of basic democracy' as a framework to analyse various well-established styles of democracy like deliberative, consociational, and direct. This last analysis may be trickier for others to reproduce because of its qualitative nature. In the end, however, it all serves to make a rather convincing argument which I hope will be taken up by my peers for further investigation particularly concerning the political implications of this 'finding'.

The paragraph above has resulted in over 5 papers which I still need to touch-up before submitting for consideration in peer-reviewed journals that will probably be read by very few people. That is why I am happy to explain an area of my research using candid language in this particular forum. The immediate value, in my humble opinion, of the research I have just presented is that it beckons us to be far more specific when using the word 'democracy'. If your lecturer uses the word 'democracy' ask them what they mean by it. If you aim to use the word 'democracy' in an assignment or in a presentation, plan to explain it. Are you talking about 'basic democracy' or are you talking about a, or several, specific forms of democracy and why is this the case? In a previous work, I have shown that even many of my distinguished peers do not make a habit of this in their own publications. If we all have our own understandings of democracy, how can we logically know what another person means by it? We have been engaging in this rather illogical form of discussion concerning democracy where there is typically no specific understanding of the word and hopefully my work may help us out of this little known rabbit hole.

So the next time you need to use the word 'democracy' and actually mean that particular form of government which supports the rise of various styles of democratic government, you've probably got a good contender to use.

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<sup>i</sup> I would like to state that this work would not have been possible without the generous support of the Government of Australia (and by extension the people of Australia) and the now closed School of Humanities and Social Sciences at QUT. I am still befuddled as to how a school can call itself a university without teaching and researching in the social sciences.

<sup>ii</sup> This work on the taxonomy is ongoing and will be included in a book I am editing which will be published in 2011.